Queen Mary
University of London

**Senate**

| Paper Title | **Periodic Review of the School of Politics and International Relations (13 March 2013)**<br><br>Response to the Periodic Review from the School of Politics and International Relations |
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| **Outcome requested** | Senate is asked to **consider and approve** the report from the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR) in response to the commendations and recommendations of the Review Panel. |
| **Points for Senate members to note and further information** | Background information<br>• Periodic Review is an evaluation of a school or institute's systems and procedures for managing, maintaining and enhancing the academic quality and standards of teaching and learning. It is a key component of QMUL's quality assurance framework.<br>• It is College policy to review academic schools and institutes approximately once every six years.<br>• The report of the SPIR review was presented to Senate at its meeting on 20 June 2013 (paper SE2012.68a). The attached paper is SPIR's twelve month response to the review.<br><br>The School has considered all the recommendations in the review report and has described its action on each. The review recommendations were also discussed at the School's Annual Programme Review meeting with the HSS Dean for Taught Programmes. Action on most recommendations is well advanced or complete. The School has taken action to:<br>• establish a clear policy on feedback to students from examinations and other forms of assessment (rec. 1);<br>• diversify research-led teaching through new module development (rec. 2), and is meeting with the Higher Education Academy discipline lead for Politics to discuss other mechanisms to diversify research-led teaching, employability and teaching enhancement (rec. 5);<br>• create a new academic role of Director of Student Engagement to oversee and support academic and pastoral support to students (rec. 3);<br>• put in place an employability action plan to support the improvement of graduate employability rates (rec. 4);<br>• review the School Administration in September 2013. |

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| | The implementation of the review recommendations are on-going (rec. 6); <br>• review learning resources, such as reading lists and module information on QMplus (rec. 7); <br>• to improve the working environment and deskspace for research students and teaching assistants. Action has also been taken at Faculty level in response to feedback from the 2013 PRES survey (rec. 8). <br><br>There was also one recommendation applicable to QMUL as a whole, supporting existing plans to introduce an additional formal assessment of research student progression between 9 and 36 months with a high priority to be assigned to associated SITS development to record outcomes (rec. 9). The Research Degrees Programmes and Examination Board has agreed to introduce a requirement for a formal progression review in years 2 and 3 of a research degree programme, the format of the progression review to be determined by each School, and has amended the 2014-15 Research Degree Academic Regulations to reflect this. |
| **Questions for Senate to consider** | Senate is asked to: <br>• **note** the response from SPIR; <br>• **note** the response to the recommendation to the School and Faculty on the working environment for research students**;** <br>• **note** the change to Academic Regulations to introduce an additional formal assessment of research student progression between 9 and 36 months; <br>• **consider** whether it is satisfied that these responses fully address the recommendations of the review panel. |
| **Regulatory/statutory reference points** | The QMUL quality assurance framework is key to the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. |
| **Strategy and risk** | QMUL's quality assurance framework is key to all aspects of the Strategic Plan and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Periodic Review is an essential component of the QA framework. |
| **Reporting/ consideration route for the paper** | Senate **to approve**. |
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| **Sponsor** | Professor Susan Dilly, Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) |

# SENATE

## School of Politics and International Relations

## Response to the Periodic Review held on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013

The School of Politics and International Relations has taken the following actions in response to the commendations and recommendations of the Periodic Review held on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013.

## Commendations

- The Panel commended the School's strategic approach to the development of the portfolio of taught programmes, for example the development of joint programmes and collaboration with other schools in the faculty.

- The Panel commended the introduction of revised marking criteria and staff development activities to ensure greater consistency in marking and feedback practices.

- The Panel commended the culture of approachability within the School, whereby staff responded to students in a notably timely manner and were accessible to students.

- The Panel commended the introduction of the innovative module POL105 that supported students in their transition from secondary to university education, and facilitated the development of productive adviser and student relationships. The undergraduate module included a series of meetings with an adviser who marked and provided feedback on work, and which aimed to address the lack of understanding about academic advising highlighted by student feedback. The module provided support with the transition from A Level to higher education through guidance on independent learning, learning styles, and reading skills.

- The Panel commended the School's take-up of supervisor training and its requirement that only trained academic staff could supervise new research students.

- The Panel commended the School's provision of activities to promote research student engagement in doctoral training through the programme of School lunchtime research seminars, the weekly Graduate Research Seminar Series, and promotion of other training opportunities within the School and College. In the Panel's meetings, PGR students praised the activities provided by the School, which enabled students to meet other students, to practise the presentation of their research and to hear about other students' work.

- The Panel commended the systematic administration, analysis and utilisation of module evaluation for taught programmes. In particular it commended:
    - the supplementation of the College module evaluation scheme with a mid-module evaluation for semester 1 and 2 modules in order to identify and address emerging issues at an early stage;

- the introduction of a sub-committee to scrutinise module convenors' reports on module evaluations, to highlight best practice, and to address concerns.

- The Panel commended the School's analysis and strategic response to the NSS results, which had led to notable improvements in student satisfaction.

- The Panel commended the Head of School and leadership teams for their strategic and inclusive approach to the management and development of the School and staff engagement in that process. In particular it commended the strategic approach taken by the Head of School to identify the skills and abilities of new staff and to appoint staff to leadership roles at an early stage in their careers.

- The Panel commended the improvements in the provision of Library resources, including the introduction of coursepacks, the increased Library budget and fostering of close links between staff, the SSLC and the HSS Senior Academic Liaison Librarian.

The School is happy to have received such a broad mix of commendations and would like to thank the panel for highlighting these areas. The School continues to work on areas of library provision as this is still an issue raised in student feedback (particularly module feedback forms). Joint programme provision is being revised alongside other Schools to see where improvements can be made and which programmes will be retired due to lack of student demand and staff provision. Engagement with PGRs has been heightened by the creation of a new PGR office on the same floor and in the same building as the School and a new staff common room: this has enabled a formal space for PGRs to work in and an informal space for them to meet staff members and other researchers. NSS continues to be a priority for the School with completion rates for 2013/14 being at a record high. The School remains committed to enhancing student learning and the student experience and being a site of academic learning that is open and supportive of students. Further enhancement in this area has been the creation of a Director of Student Experience position within the School.

**Recommendations**

**Feedback on Assessments**

1. *The Panel recommends that the School implement a clear policy about feedback on assessments, which should include a minimum standard for examination feedback, particularly where examinations are the primary assessment method for a module (para. 48).*

The School has established a clear policy on exam feedback that has been communicated to all students through re-induction in September, individual modules, and personal tutors. The School's policy is that exam feedback is available to all students on request during term time. Students should allow 2 weeks after the date of request for the School to retrieve the script and convenor to review it. Feedback should be given by the person who marked the script. Where the marker is unavailable the student should seek guidance from their personal tutor.

In addition to establishing and communicating a clear policy on exams, the 2012 School Away Day focused on progression data and means of assessment to better assist student attainment. All staff have built exam and assessment feedback into seminars, lectures and tutorials as appropriate.

**Curriculum**

2.    *The Panel recommends that the School diversify its research-led teaching activities, building on its existing provision (para. 56)*

Undergraduate: New modules were introduced in 2013/14 to build on existing teaching provision: Africa and International Politics (Level 6); Democracy in Action (Level 6); Background to British Politics (Level 4); and Parliamentary Studies (Level 6). These have proved to be very popular with students, with modules such as African and International Politics having 86 students enrolled on the module.

Undergraduate: Teaching provision has been reviewed for 2014/15. New modules will be introduced - Race and Racism in World Politics (Level 6); Politics and the Media (Level 6); Comparative European Politics (Level 5) – to reflect student interest. Level 6 modules in political theory have been rationalised and renamed to appeal to students. All level 6 modules with potential overlapping content have been reviewed.

Postgraduate: New modules will be introduced in 2014/15 as part of the new MA British Politics and the distance learning MA European Public Policy. The introduction of distance learning is new to the School and will be a flagship initiative in the expansion of research-led teaching activities.

**Academic Advising**

3.    *The Panel recommends that the School review its mechanisms for providing academic and pastoral support to undergraduate students, in particular in years 2 and 3, and that it develop guidance for Academic Advisers on the frequency of meetings and topics for discussion in meetings with students. The Panel was concerned that the School was providing excellent support to year 1 students, which was not then continued into years 2 and 3 (para. 65).*

The School has introduced a new academic role, Director of Student Engagement, to work with our Student Support Officer in administration. This new academic role and the clear demarcation of the Student Support Officer role were introduced in direct response to this recommendation from the Review. All students were re-inducted in September to remind them of the support systems available, introduce them to their second and third years of study, and generate a sense of belonging to the School. The School has continued to host a range of extra-curricular events in support of wider student engagement.

**Employability**

4.    *The Panel recommends that the School develop an employability action plan as a matter of urgency to address graduate employability rates (para. 70)*

The School has an employability action plan and regularly engages Jeff Riley from the Careers Service on events, support and opportunities for students. The

Communications and Marketing Officer in the School consistently promotes careers events to students and works closely with the Careers Service. Graduate attributes are now clearly included in every undergraduate module handbook and some modules include methods of assessment that address both academic skills and employability skills e.g. country reports as a complement to academic essays. Employability has been directly addressed through built-in internships as a part of new modules such as Parliamentary Studies (with the UK Parliament) and the Global Politics of Health (with the World Health Organisation).

## Engagement with the Higher Education Academy

5.      *The Panel recommends that the School consider engaging with the Higher Education Academy discipline lead for Politics in taking forward the above recommendations, in particular on employability, the further development of research-led teaching activities, and teaching enhancement more generally (para. 71)*

The Director of Taught Programmes has been in communication with Steven Curtis of the HEA about opportunities for the School. Dr Curtis will attend the School's Learning and Teaching Committee in May to set out some of the events of the HEA and opportunities for collaboration and membership.

## Administrative Support

6.      *The Panel recommends that the School review the roles, organisation and training of staff in student-facing administrative roles in order to improve the support provided to students (para. 100)*

The School underwent an Administration Review in September 2013. The implementation of the Review's recommendations are ongoing and being managed as a priority by the School's senior leadership team. The position of a permanent Director of Administration has been advertised with the view to appointment in Summer 2014.

## Learning Resources

7.      *The Panel recommends that the School review the provision of learning resources for students. In particular the Panel recommends that:*
   - *the School should ensure that all readings marked as 'essential' for particular essay topics are available to all students taking the module as a free or compulsory purchase textbook or coursepack (with any extra costs clearly communicated to students), as multiple copies in the QM library, or as e-resources available via QMplus (para. 109);*
   - *the School should conduct a review of all QMplus areas (either internally or with the E-Learning Unit) to ensure that the provision of information and resources for 2013-14 utilises the system's potential for innovation, in line with the HSS Faculty E-learning plan. The Panel recognised that the School had recently been working to ensure that all QMplus areas met the HSS minimum standard (para. 111).*

The layout and usability of module outlines was discussed at the School Away Day. All staff are encouraged to trim and clearly label their readings lists to ensure they are student friendly and easy to use. The School is keen to emphasise clear alignment between module outlines and QM Plus module pages. Course-packs have

been introduced for core first year modules and the School is reviewing the introduction of course-packs for second year modules.

The Learning Institute conducted an audit of the School's QM Plus pages and produced a report of its findings. All QM Plus pages within the School meet the minimum standard for HSS. The Learning and Teaching Committee is currently reviewing all QM Plus pages within the School to make a set of recommendations to all staff with regard to the minimum requirements for QM Plus pages, best practice, and standardising pages so that they are user-friendly and avoid student confusion. Recommendation to School and Faculty

**Working space for Teaching Assistants and Research Students**

8. *The Panel recommends that the School review the working environment and desk space available to research students and Teaching Assistants, and that it ensures that TAs have access to appropriate office space for meetings with students. The Panel acknowledges that the issue of working space for research students is also an issue for other schools in HSS, and so refers the recommendation to the Faculty for consideration (para. 103)*

Desk space for research students (PGRs) and teaching assistants (TAs) has been reviewed. Provision of new office space has been made for all PGRs and TAs that is on the same floor, in the same building as the rest of the School offices. In addition PGRs and TAs have full access to the new staff common room in the School which gives them extra space to work and an informal space to interact with academic and administrative staff. Rooms for drop-in hours have been improved and where possible take place on the same floor as the School offices rather than in dark basements that are hard to find.

Faculty Response

The Faculty Deputy Dean for Research also has been working with schools in HSS on this issue and in response to comments on workspace made in the 2013 Postgraduate Research Student Experience Survey (PRES).

Following the release of the PRES results, the Doctoral College has been working with the Library to assess patterns of use of the Library Reading Room. The analysis shows the highest levels of use to be amongst those Schools in HSS lacking their own graduate rooms. However, the Reading Room remains under-utilised. A Working Group consisting of the Deputy Dean for HSS, Library Support Services, and PGR students has been established to identify ways in which the Reading Room can be improved to make it a more attractive work environment.

At a Faculty level, the HSS Directors of Graduate Studies Forum in October 2013 suggested that though shared work space will always be needed, what students most value is work space within their own Schools over which they may feel a sense of ownership, in which they may make a base for themselves, and to provide a focal point for the School's PGR cohort (enhancing research cultures).This analysis was supported by discussions with students in the Library Working Group. SPIR has taken action as noted above. Wider space constraints mean that it is currently impossible for SED, History and SLLF to provide such space in their own buildings, so the Faculty is now trialling a turnover of the management and use of the two graduate rooms in the Lock Keepers Cottage for the sole use of students from SED and SLLF, and of the graduate working room in Arts 2 for students from History. It is

hoped that this will provide the space that students from these Schools need. Law already provides dedicated work rooms for PGR students at both its Mile End and Lincoln Inn Fields (CCLS) sites, but in response to the concerns expressed in PRES are now further improving these to encourage higher use, with the provision of more locker space for students.

## Recommendation to College

### Monitoring of Research Student Progression

9.      *The Panel endorses College plans to introduce an additional formal assessment of research student progression between 9 and 36 months, and recommends that the College give high priority to the necessary SITS development work to support the implementation of the policy (para. 83).*

### Comment from ARCS

This recommendation was referred to the Research Degrees Office and discussed by the Research Degrees Programmes and Examination Board. The Board has agreed to introduce a requirement for a formal progression review in years 2 and 3 of a research degree programme, the format of the progression review to be determined by each School. Consequently the following changes to the Research Degrees Academic Regulations for 2014-15 are presented to Senate (in a separate paper on this agenda). SITS development work to support this additional progression review is under way and is being monitored by regular reports to the Doctoral College Management Group.

#### Extract from the proposed Research Degree Academic Regulations 2014-15

Additions to text are shown in italic.

8.6.1 The normal minimum progression points for a full time student on a PhD, MPhil or MD(Res) programme occur between 6 to 9 months after registration on the research studies programme, *between 18 and 24 months after registration*, and at 36 months where examination entry has not occurred. For a part time student on a PhD, MPhil or MD(Res) programme the normal progression points occur between 12 to 18 months after registration on the research studies programme, *between 36 and 48 months after registration*, and 72 months where examination entry has not occurred.

8.65     *Progression decisions at 18-24 months and at 36 months are made in accordance with procedures outlined in the relevant research studies programme regulations, approved by Senate or its delegated authority.*